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ABSTRACT

Tertiary institutions worldwide are catering increasingly to adult, part-time students who are entering higher education for the first time. This paper addresses the compound problems that these students face in attempting to pursue a distance education in a second language. It offers the specific example of Hong Kong and the access and degree programs offered by The University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education. The paper analyzes the types of study and communication problems open learning students may bring with them to their studies, and recommends a policy of communication and study skills training as a means of ensuring both program quality and student access to full degree programs. Contains 7 references. (LB)

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Ensuring Access and Quality in Open Learning Programmes: Communication and Study Skills Training for ESL-Medium Higher Education[1]

Nigel J. Bruce

Tertiary institutions worldwide are increasingly catering to adult, part-time students who 'missed the boat' to higher education the first time round. This paper addresses the compound problems these students face in attempting to pursue a distance education in a second language, and offers the specific example of Hong Kong and the access and degree programmes offered by the University of Hong Kong's School of Professional and Continuing Education. The paper analyses the types of study and communication problems open learning students may bring with them to their studies, and recommends a policy of communication and study skills training as a means of ensuring both student access to full degree programmes, and the quality of the education offered.

Introduction

There are a number of reasons why societies evolve a Second-language(L2)-medium education system, whether beginning at the primary, secondary or only tertiary level. They may be relics of colonial rule or economic dominance, multilingual or ethnically-diverse countries, like India, Singapore or Nigeria, where national language planning has determined it prudent to adopt a neutral language of international currency. Or they may be countries like the Gulf States or Hong Kong which, with whatever mixed feelings, feel they cannot train an academic community or sustain academic programmes of any international currency using their own language as the learning medium. In addition to the neutral language imperative, reasons for sustaining L2-medium education include: the continuing dependence of the majority of universities in the developing world on English for post-graduate training of their own faculty; the status of English as the international currency 'standard' of western education; and the exponential growth of the knowledge base, rendering uneconomical the duplication of all publications in the languages of every language group. While non-Anglophone developed countries can easily maintain tertiary education in their own language, even they now insist on their students developing at least academic reading competence in English [for a fuller exploration of the phenomenon of ESL-medium education and its implications, see Bruce 1990].

This paper explores the role and provision of language and study skills training in special 'feeder' and diploma programmes offering access to degree programmes. It identifies some of the problems open learners carry with them from their earlier educational experiences, and offers recommendations for the assurance of both accessibility and quality for such programmes in an L2-medium educational context. The type of distance education referred to here is open, adult learning; 'distance' is characterised by lower contact with faculty and other students, by poorer study facilities and pastoral care than that enjoyed by full-time students, and by the critical fact that most students are in full-time employment. In Hong Kong, most students do receive frequent lectures and regular tutorials, so the 'physical' distance is not as great as for students of, for example, the U.K.'s Open University system, with its televised lectures and assignments by correspondence. Lee (1992) discusses the relationship between 'openness' and 'distance' in education, with special reference to the programmes offered by HKU's School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE).

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First, a few words about the distinct nature of 2nd-language-medium education and why, in the author's opinion, it appears to have an identity problem. For a long time, the ESL-medium system - in Africa and the Middle East, as well as in Hong Kong - succeeded in educating an elite 'cadre'; now, with the democratisation of education and the greater aspiration to further and higher education, there is pressure for a curriculum and an educational approach less removed from the culture and concerns of the broad community. There is considerable pressure among intellectuals in Hong Kong for the English medium to be abandoned; some educationists cite Canadian evidence of the 'additive' benefits of a bilingual education (each improving performance in the other language) in support of curricular reform as sufficient to provide a worthwhile ESL-medium education for a large proportion of Hong Kong schoolchildren (and Chinese-medium for the rest). What is clear is that, at present, those who 'failed' the first time round still face problems of accessibility to an 'international' higher education, in many cases because of the level of literacy or study skills in the 2nd language required for successful part-time study at that level.

The author's concern with the University's ESL-medium identity has grown out of discussions with colleagues from academic teaching departments during four years at the University of Hong Kong. These discussions have ranged over the issues of students' language needs, the 2nd-language-medium nature of tertiary education in Hong Kong, and the problems many students have in coping with the demands of ESL-medium academic study. They have yielded the kind of collage of views, perspectives and rationales that have made it difficult to assemble a coherent identity of this university as a 2nd-language-medium institution. Compounding the uncertainty over identity has been news of radical educational change taking place in the U.K., with the gradual removal of the distinction between universities and polytechnics, the intensification of the education vs. training debate, and the creation of elite research universities to allow most universities to place greater emphasis on teaching. At the same time, the rise to prominence of the 'educational accountant' has brought 'cost-centering' and the sight of academic disciplines seeking new groupings in which to huddle for safety from the descending rubber chop. All these changes have caused teaching professionals to question a whole range of assumptions about the educational system they work in, and the education they offer their students.

This 'identity problem' has been aggravated by the 2nd-language-medium dimension of the system, and has pervaded Hong Kong tertiary education at a number of levels, through the educational missions of institutions, the curricular aims of disciplinary degree programmes and departmental teaching approaches, down to the teaching units directly charged with tackling academic communication. In this paper, I explore the implications of the 2nd-language-medium dimension of education in Hong Kong for Access programmes by characterising the kinds of learning difficulties language teaching staff have encountered in one particular ESL-medium tertiary institution, through involvement both with full-time Social Sciences and Arts Faculty undergraduates and with adult open learning students on the London University external diploma in Economics. I then make recommendations:

i) for ensuring and maintaining what Squires (1990, p.32) calls 'real accessibility' to ESL-medium adult open learning students, and quality of those access and degree programmes;

ii) on the kinds of learning aims and objectives we have set for the study and communication skill courses we provide here on the Diploma in Economics programme, and would recommend for other L2-medium Access courses;

iii) on the kinds of educational and learning approaches which have proved difficult to implement here in Hong Kong, but which, it is argued, are suitable not only for study and communication skills programmes, but also for academic subject teaching, at both access and degree levels.

While most of the comments below apply specifically to the Hong Kong context, they are offered for consideration of their applicability to other L2-medium educational environments.

Problems Facing Open Access Students: Learning and Communication

The last decade has seen an expanding range of open learning options being offered worldwide,

and certainly in Hong Kong. As Squires (1990, p.32) says "there are more second routes and second chances, and fewer dead-ends and irreversible choices than in the past". Figures at Hong Kong University's School of Professional & Continuing Education clearly show the upsurge in demand for higher education among the working population, a measure of the desire for personal development and advancement (Holford, 1992, p.17). The School also has figures to show the extent to which applicants' linguistic competence - their competence in English, the medium of the bulk of international distance education programmes - impedes their access to that education.

The weaker the English competence of ESL students, the greater the problem of access to information. Processing information becomes problematic both in terms of the quantity of information students can deal with - the reading load can be intimidating - and in terms of quality, identifying the conceptual structure of an extended text or the author's arguments and attitudes or positions. In our experience, students often fail to appreciate important rhetorical dimensions of texts, where authors dismiss or lend authority to other writers' work. They also have problems with the use of expressions of modality to distance the writer from (or associate him/her with) others' or their own findings, implications or conclusions. These are not overly-sophisticated reading skills; they are fundamental to academic communication, at least according to the standards set by the U.K.-based degree-awarding bodies represented in Hong Kong. The author coordinates and teaches a course in language & study skills for Sociology on the University of London's diploma access programme to the full B.Econ. degree programme. London's Board of Examiners has issued clear directives that mere descriptive regurgitation of set texts is not what is being sought; it is not part of the educational aims and objectives even of the access diploma syllabus.

If these are the kinds of problem experienced by A-level matriculants who have gained entry to Hong Kong's premier tertiary institution, the implications for open access are obvious. We must, however, be wary of ascribing rhetorical problems uniquely to linguistic shortcomings in individual students. Before looking at these communicative problems in detail, we should briefly consider the kinds of educational context from which many Access students have emerged, and the kind of English-medium system which complicates the provision of access programmes in ESL-medium systems like Hong Kong.

Background problems: Previous learning experiences

A majority of students attempting to pursue open learning programmes, it may be assumed, were unable to derive the full benefit of their adolescent experience of formal education. In some cases, a non-literate home environment may have offered scant preparation for an 'abstract' academic curriculum, possibly retarding the development of the kinds of abstract reasoning abilities that make it easier to respond positively to such a curriculum. Access to higher education continues to be determined by success in the theoretical rather than practical pursuit of knowledge and understanding. Winch (1990) writes:

> "There are no easy or glib ways of getting around what is a major paradox of mass education - namely, that it is a preparation for life that divorces itself from life in order to be an efficient preparation for it" (p.105).

In Hong Kong, the use of English as the learning medium in most schools has served to accentuate the remoteness of education from everyday life, and the rather theoretical way English has been taught - dissociated from the rest of the curriculum - has tended to alienate a large number of students. Teaching practice is only now slowly coming to reflect the fact that the rest of the school curriculum is also conducted in English, and that it is a language which needs to be put to practical use as a learning medium. For too long English teaching in schools has been defined in terms of complexity of lexis and syntax, with some branching beyond the sentence to take account of 'cohesion' between propositions. In mitigation, this conformity to a traditional teaching approach owes much to the fact that the vast majority of secondary school teachers of English are non-native speakers, whose own training in English would have been highly traditional. Their continuance of conservative traditions is encouraged by the administrative structure within which they work. Schools work to a uniform curriculum, with a single exam board and a Department of Education and Manpower struggling to ensure minimum standards of teaching competence.

There is, therefore, an understandable tendency to regard the rhetorical dimension of expression as non-linguistic, and not properly within the brief of the 'English teacher'. There is also a discomfort with this level of expression; most Hong Kong secondary teachers' L1 has never been used for the kinds of academic transaction that constituted their own higher education, and they were never asked or required to reflect on the way in which the English language was being used. When one considers that many English teachers are not even products of a tertiary English education or training, it is not surprising that they revert to the type of English teaching they were last in contact with - their own. It is of no surprise then when tertiary tutors, rather than requiring evidence of any argumentative or expository skills, are forced to be satisfied with 'approximate' evidence of student understanding, token and often discrete 'points' which imply an argument but fall short of delivering it.

Problems of academic communication: Strategies and Skills

Each of the following 'shortcomings' are treated briefly; suggestions as to how they can be tackled in the curriculum are holistic, and are offered later. It is important that these deficiencies be seen as treatable and not as nebulous gripes or apologies for the 'innate' indolence or incompetence of our students. Based on experience with full-time and open learning students at HKU then, it would seem that many students leave Hong Kong secondary school with a language competence and study strategy profile featuring a number of the following characteristics:

Reading 'through a microscope': Students often exhibit a 'locally-focused' reading technique, reading line by line and often selecting information out of context. On the evidence of 1st-year students at the University, skimming for gist and scanning for specific information do not seem to have been perceived in the secondary school as strategies which 'pay off'; they do not seem to feature on the short list of skills seen to be crucially formative of the intellect or an ability to pursue higher study. Adult learners and undergraduates alike tend to quote out of context, demonstrating incompetence even below the level of the sentence, even when attempting to quote or copy from a source text.

Linear approach to text: Students often seem unaware of the rhetorical strategies writers or speakers employ beyond the level of the sentence. Texts tend to be approached as an unfolding series of declarative statements, rather than as the final implementation of a design, filled out linguistically from a 'master' conceptual and rhetorical design. Students characteristically do not bring with them a 'top-down' approach to reading at an academic level, and lack understanding of conventional patterns of academic discourse or genres, or of how an argument or exposition (e.g. by classification, comparison, etc.) is typically structured. This is inevitably reflected in student writing, and is particularly noticeable in student responses to essay questions, where there is often insufficient reflection on the implications of the question, or how the question setter might be asking for a specific slant on the subject in question.

Surface approach to text: Students exhibit a preoccupation with the declarative quality of statements in texts, even in response to questions about a writer's attitude and stance. There follows a consequent inability to paraphrase precisely a writer's stance on an issue; 'X says that..' is more likely than 'X denies/criticises/ suggests that...'. Most students do not seem to have been encouraged at school to engage in interpretation or argumentation, and few open learning students show evidence of having been encouraged to develop these skills in the workplace. Most students do not give the impression that they are aware that detailed information is generally used in communication only to serve higher rhetorical goals (e.g. to support or illustrate an assertion or argument).

Problems with abstract language: Students are often unable to paraphrase with the use of abstract terminology, or to integrate such terminology into their discourse. Terms which will succinctly paraphrase an idea or proposition tend not to be used, despite their being part of the students' vocabulary, e.g. 'X dismisses Y's theory'. One notices this shortcoming most glaringly in students' introductions (and conclusions) to essay questions, where this type of paraphrase and summary are useful , if not essential, in any reply which eases the reader, smoothly but succinctly, towards the writer's position or argument.

A 'product' approach to writing: A handicap which is not restricted to Hong Kong - or even to a L2-medium educational system - is the notion that the act of writing is a once-and-for-all commitment

via a linear outpouring of ideas, crystallised on paper. There is something unreflective about the assembly of ideas in many first essays at the tertiary level in H.K., though this may say more about the attitude towards writing inculcated at school than about the capability of the student to produce a more reasoned and rhetorically sophisticated piece of communication. Teachers at secondary school could perhaps usefully reflect on the dictum attributed to E.M.Forster: "How do I know what I think until I see what I say?". The very process of articulation can lead to the discovery of new insights and ideas; students should be encouraged to write drafts of essays and reports, and teachers should be willing to offer constructive comments on them. For various reasons, this is not done - students are reluctant to do it, and teachers seem reluctant to require it of them, especially at tertiary level, where the workload implications are often strong deterrents. Many teachers regard the written submission purely as an object for judgement, the crystallisation of what the student 'knows'.

Plagiarism: Anathema to most teachers, 'plagiarism' generally masks a number of sins of the system, notably encouragement of the 'guru' fallacy. Students generally place great reliance on the words of an acknowledged authority on a subject - typically, their lecturers and the authors of the designated 'key' textbooks. They do this for good reason; the whole upper secondary training is geared to memorising the words of experts for exam regurgitation. Students, whether full-time or adult open learners, approach tertiary study with the idea that, as a demonstration of 'learning', university tutors simply want their own, or their sources', words returned to them as faithfully as possible. It would seem that the root of the plagiarism 'syndrome' lies in the discrepancy between the standard of English which the students feel they should emulate, and their own perceived standard of English, which they feel to be inadequate to the task of paraphrasing what these expert writers have said.

This last 'problem area' encapsulates the problems of the ESL-medium system. Students rightly feel resentful at the idea that dishonesty lies at the root of their plagiarism. With so much to learn - in a 2nd language - little energy is left over to spend on crafting an original yet sufficiently sophisticated stylistic display of prowess in English. For students to be convinced that this expenditure of energy is worthwhile and even essential to advancing their intellectual development, requires a switch of emphasis away from the thoughts of the experts to the interpretations and opinions of the students themselves. This requires more than lip service; it needs an emphasis on the arts of reasoning and persuasion, if students are to be guided as well as encouraged towards the articulation of their own ideas and arguments.

Teachers in adult education programmes have a responsibility to empower students to realise their learning potential, and to discover their critical voice. Perhaps epitomising L2-medium tertiary institutions' identity problem are those external examiners' reports, which reveal a simultaneous concern with and acquiescence in the L2 student penchant for merely giving evidence of declarative knowledge, at the expense of rhetorical effectiveness or any evidence of a broad reading base. ESL-medium tertiary institutions have to face the problem that, even with access study and communication skills programmes, they will have difficulty maintaining the international 'currency' of their degrees if there is not a change in the whole curriculum, in the way learning is organised, and in the expectations of tutors and examiners. In Hong Kong, the tolerance of prospective employers is already being tested, with comments from the Engineering, Law and Business communities suggesting a perceived decline in graduates' ability to communicate or to apply their 'knowledge' - and these are criticisms of graduates from full-time programmes.

Ensuring and Maintaining Access to Higher Education in an ESL-medium System

Educational planners, whether in a government education ministry or a school or university, need to consider the full implications of adopting a second language as the educational medium - at whatever level. If that system is English-medium - as it is for all the participants here - then English is not simply another subject in the curriculum. It is the medium through which the rest of the curriculum passes; knowledge is inert without the ability or means to communicate it. In open learning, it is vital to consider the implications of the bilateral nature of academic communication, and its critical role in providing access, not only to formal education itself, but to information at any level.

Maintaining access: feeder and certificate/diploma courses

With access programmes in ESL-medium education, it is clear that the language problem presents open learning institutions with two clear choices: either screen or enable. One can either require a minimum level of English proficiency for access to a programme - even an Access programme - or one can set about enabling students to gain such access, by developing purpose-built academic study and communication skills (ACSS) courses. In the kind of EFL environment that Hong Kong presents, I would recommend at least 2 tiers of access ACSS programmes:

1) a preliminary intensive 'feeder' course which, while heavy on the mechanics of the language, takes a functional approach, emphasising the particular situations and speech functions for which certain structures, expressions and registers are useful in basic academic communication.

2) an in-sessional academic communication and study skill course geared very much to specific academic courses. The School of Professional and Continuing Education (SPACE) has consistently supported this kind of programme in running the London University external diploma in Economics programme - indeed London warmly supported the idea. There is no formal recognition of work done on this course, largely because the linguistic profiles of the student populations at the various distance centres vary so much.

I am not aware of any moves elsewhere to build formal ACSS-type components to Access or degree programmes, but news of any such developments would be welcome. Experience at the university of Hong Kong has shown that where ACSS-type courses are given 'credit-worthiness' or the equivalent, student interest, motivation, commitment and consequently workrate increases dramatically. It is one thing to argue that students will respond to material that has intrinsic quality, but open learning students are under too much pressure not to give priority to work that they are obliged to complete. What is clear is that any Access ACSS course centred around the skills of 'reading and writing', or on 'English grammar', would betray an institutional belief in a remedial role for English language teaching and the effectiveness of a retrospective and retroactive remedial approach to the problem of providing wider access to ESL-medium higher education.

To be avoided, above all, is a situation where policy or resourcing constraints oblige open learning programme administrators to reject outright applicants for higher level programmes on the grounds of their irremediable 'linguistic' shortcomings.

Maintaining quality: the degree programme

If the access courses have been effective in facilitating access to academic information and argumentation, the only communication skills training component necessary for incorporation into a full degree programme should be at the productive, articulatory end of the spectrum, with language experts advising on oral presentation or written papers. If one is aiming at lifelong enablement, I would recommend taking a further step, by broadening the curriculum to accommodate the study of communication itself as an object of intellectual enquiry.

Such moves are afoot in the full-time undergraduate curriculum at HKU, where attempts are being made to give greater intellectual substance to 1st-year academic communication and study skill (ACSS-type) courses, on the basis that true communicative empowerment involves the ability to question the very pedagogy and the very system of communication through which academic 'power' is exercised[2]. This development has run parallel with a move towards promoting learner independence and confidence, and in general maximising the use of teacher and student time, through a more flexible curriculum and the development of more self-access, individualised options. Further, there has been a realisation that academic communication can only be improved in a fully academic context, when the language is put to academic use at a level comparable and contributing to the rest of the curriculum; applied linguistic expertise now ranges beyond the description of linguistic systems to exploring the role of language as a social semiotic, and as a vital tool of negotiation, transaction and general persuasion - everything that used to hold a central place in the tertiary curriculum as 'Rhetoric'. In an L2-medium system, the applied linguist can play a key role in empowering students, not only to understand better how and why language

is used in the academic community, but to be able to discuss that use, to take a more critical view of text, and to develop powers of argumentation that they might have thought were the province of the expert.

Tackling Learning and Communication Skills Together: Recommendations

Aims and Objectives for Access (& other) Open Learning Programmes

The overall aim of an ACSS-type Access course should be to improve the ability of students to meet the communicative demands of English-medium academic study, a direction in which ACSS courses for full-time students are increasingly moving. Such ACSS courses would aim at developing students':

1) attitude to study and communication: valuing the study process as much as the submitted product, collaboration as much as competition, questions as much as answers;

2) confidence in offering their own opinions, interpretations, speculations, etc., in writing or when engaging in seminar exchanges;

3) preparedness for independent academic study: use of library, dictionaries, reference books, and seeking meaning, definitions, clarifications and further related publications;

4) awareness of what is expected of them in academic communication (especially assignment questions) and of how language is used in the academic sphere;

5) ability to handle extensive reading assignments and lectures, and to perceive how they are structured, through 'advance organisers', indicators of change of main topic or aspect, for example;

Students at HKU face a colossal amount of information input effectively "embedded" in a second/foreign language, English. One of our aims in the ACSS programmes, is to place the focus primarily on the ideas running through the text, and on the students engaging in the process of getting that information out of the text. Consequently, there is a strong emphasis on how writers structure their ideas, and the rhetorical techniques they use in exposition, argument, etc. The materials highlight relevant rhetorical and structural devices and patterns, and offer practice in recognising and then producing these in appropriate academic contexts and tasks.

Given the resourcing constraints, and the need to cultivate in students an independent, discovery- and process-oriented approach to their studies, the course concentrates on a 'study cycle', geared essentially to the development of confidence and effective strategies in those skills of academic reading and writing, which are so important to successful 'open' part-time study. To cope specifically with these academic communicative demands, students are trained in the following skills, listed as they feature in the 'study cycle':

a) access and abstract information from academic texts, lectures and seminars in English

b) further analyse, evaluate and interpret these inputs for their underlying conceptual content,and for authorial stance

c) synthesise information from sources and organise it so as to highlight the patterns and overall direction of the argument/thesis

d) articulate clearly in English a range of academic response types (summary, evaluation, application, etc.), both oral and written

This kind of course design reflects a learner-centred approach, but still falls short of empowering students to express themselves as academic 'equals'. This is ultimately where open learning should lead, preparing students for lifelong participation in an enquiring, intellectual (if not 'academic') community. It is to this end that the ACSS programme for full-time Social Science students has begun to pursue a

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curricular approach aimed at developing students as fellow investigators of knowledge, with the emphasis on 'enquiry' rather than 'study'. Real academic enquiry is not about textbooks or lectures, but about pursuing problems, explanations and resolutions. In this ACSS course, Social Science students are encouraged to go beyond the more theoretical textbook and lecture input, to formulate hypotheses for testing received or contentious views or assumptions 'on the ground', through questionnaire surveys and the examination of studies conducted in Hong Kong itself. With this approach, students engage directly with an intellectually-challenging issue, and make a personal (and collective) investment in the investigative process and in its outcomes. This combined study and investigative approach builds student confidence, by ensuring familiarity with key terminology and concepts, so essential to diminishing the 'opacity' of texts and giving students freer rein to their ideas.

It also offers them opportunities to engage in purposeful academic interaction: debate, discussion, negotiation and oral presentation.

Tertiary-level open learning should be able to move in this direction, and some programmes are being directed with the necessary imagination and sophisticated sense of educational aims and motivations. Most external ESL-medium open learning programmes, however, are still at the stage of taking on board the role of an ACSS course, aimed simply at developing communicative and study skills at a higher level of sophistication than the students have previously experienced. It will be some time before we can hope for an integration of approach across the curriculum. Not least among the reasons for this is the great disparity of proficiency among those seeking access to these programmes. At present, ESL-medium open learning programmes need to develop strategies for identifying the different levels of student language need, and for organising a coherent structure for provision.

Teaching Approaches for ACSS-type Open Learning Programmes

It is not enough to propose aims and objectives for developing academic communication and study skills, and to have a sound pedagogical theory. It is also important to manage student learning efficiently - especially in the spartan supervision conditions prevailing in open learning programmes. I would offer as a prescription, where circumstances and resources allow, the same teaching approach advised for the study skills and communication access courses in the University's English Centre.

a) Seminar-type group discussions, offering an informal yet authentic forum in which to practise their productive skills; students are actually advised to form close study groups of three or four, which can continue mutual study support beyond the ACSS classroom.

b) Debates and oral presentations, again, developing seminar skills, but being conscious of the need to develop students' confidence in their own oral performance.

c) Small-group investigative projects, at strategic points in the course, involving students in primary and secondary research and work in a more independent but collaborative mode. Subject tutors could participate in the evaluation of the project, working out performance objectives along with their language specialist counterparts. Many of the course objectives could be pursued within the structure of well-managed research projects.

d) Self-access and self-directed 'individualised' learning: this area needs a great deal of support. Audio-visual and computer-assisted self-learning packages need to be made available to students in such a way as to complement structured programmes. Students need, above all, access to word processors as they should be encouraged to develop a process approach to writing, and a systematic and economical approach to the storage and up-dating of their notes. English-enhancement staff can collaborate with their subject discipline counterparts to build up a bank of self-access materials tailored to cater for the full range of students' specific skill and subject-related needs, and to allow for supplementary 'customised' remedial language work.

Above all, such a course should adopt an approach which de-mystifies academic study. Faculty tutors can play an important role in helping students adjust to English-medium study, notably by adopting

a more formative approach to the evaluation of student writing, e.g. by soliciting first drafts for comment on both content and argumentation, and then asking for revisions to be submitted along with the reviewed first draft.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to sketch out the potential role and character of an effective and programme-wide approach to 2nd-language-medium tertiary education, whether at feeder, Access, or degree programme level. I have described what I feel are optimal aims and approaches of academic communication and study skill courses in the ESL-medium distance-learning context, but above all I have tried to draw attention to the importance of being very clear about the distinctive character of 2nd-language as opposed to 1st-language-medium open education.

Notes

[1]This is a revised version of a paper given at the International Conference on Continuing Higher Education in Hong Kong, Jan. 6-8, 1992, at The University of Hong Kong.

[2]This is assuming that there is no contradiction between empowering with access to higher status and income - a strong marketing pull in Hong Kong - and empowering with the development of a 'critical consciousness' (Freire, 1973). For more on empowerment in education, see Simon (1987).

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